

June 28, 2007 Thursday

GOOD MORNING AMERICA 7:31 AM EST

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) But first, we have new questions about pro wrestler - Chris Benoit and that alleged murder-suicide. The investigation has zeroed in on steroids and what role they may have played in the tragedy. But there are new clues surfacing that could take the case in a whole new direction, clues about what was a Benoit family secret, their 7-year-old son's rare genetic disorder, known as Fragile X, an inherited form of mental retardation often accompanied by autism, a point of tension for Benoit and his wife, apparently. Another clue. We're learning that Benoit was about to be demoted by the WWE.

GRAPHICS: WRESTLER FAMILY TRAGEDY

GRAPHICS: WAS IT A BATTLE OVER DISABLED SON?

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) So let's turn now to **Linda McMahon**, CEO and co-founder of World Wrestling Entertainment. Linda, thank you. Thank you.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Thank you, Robin.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) I know it's a, it's a difficult time for the WWE family. But we...

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Yes.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) ...we want to understand a little bit more. And you, you knew Chris for, for 10 years, and there's no way you can possibly foresee something of this tragic nature happening. But trying to understand what may have been in his mind. Was he about to be demoted from a main, a main wrestler to a lesser role as a coach?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

No. I'm not sure actually where that came from.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Mm-hmm.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Chris, we have, we have three brands with WWE, RAW, SmackDown and ECW. And, and Chris was going to be part of, of one of those brands. It wasn't a demotion at all. But I think, you know, what we really have to look at, Robin, is the, the facts that have come to light to us over the last couple of days because this terrible tragedy that happened is so out of character from anything that we knew of Chris or any of his co-workers knew of him. He was a mild-mannered guy. No one had ever seen him get angry. He kept, he was private, but he was a, a good friend. He was a locker room leader. He was supportive of the young men who came in the organization.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Mm-hmm.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

And as we found out over the last, literally, probably over the last 48 hours, we found out about Daniel's illness, which we did not know. And...

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) You weren't aware of that before?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

We, no, we were not of - aware of any of that before. We were not aware of any tension in the home. We were not aware, nor, nor would we likely to have been, you know, what happens inside someone's private home. But even the fact that, that Nancy had filed for divorce in 2003, none of those things did we know, that there was any particular strife, because it didn't manifest itself. You know...

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) And the restraining order, you had no idea that there was a restraining order?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Well, no. Absolutely not. The only time we'd ever seen Chris with Daniel or with Nancy, and I had personally, you know, sat next to a breakfast table with them at one of our events, Wrestle Mania, and he was a loving, kind father. He was with another wrestler and his wife and family. The boys were playing. I mean, he really, this was absolutely, we don't know what snapped inside of Chris. But we do understand now, in fact, I think the, the focus of this is really turning more to the tension that must have been happening between a husband and wife over, you know, the management and the schooling and the rearing of this child who had the mental retardation. We've, we've learned that Nancy wanted Chris home more. Well, his job is on the road.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Mm-hmm.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

But we have found that Chris would actually fly home to spend four, five hours just to be with Daniel. So all of this is so totally incongruous to anything we knew.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) But even looking back, there was nothing, no mood swings, no emotional turbulence that you saw whatsoever in this man?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Nothing. Nothing. Chris did ask in 2006 to have some time off to...

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Mm-hmm.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

...spend more time at home. And he, he was off for four months, took that extended leave. And we, we were happy to, to grant that any time any of our talent, you know, need to have time off to do that, they certainly are welcome to do that.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) I'm sure that you're aware of what some people have said about the profession of wrestling and even some of those have been inside, like the ex-wife of Stone Cold Steve Austin, his wife who said that she was abused by him, talks about the, the prevalence of - steroid use with wrestling, some people saying as high as 75% of the wrestlers. Are you aware, and what, what is the WWE doing?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Well, I can only speak for the WWE in terms of our, you know, in our profession. And we have always had, you know, a drug policy since the late '80s. We've, we've morphed from you know, street drug testing to, to steroid - steroid testing to more comprehensive testing which we have now in our wellness policy, is what we call it...

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Mm-hmm.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

...was put into effect in February of 2006. And, and in, in that policy, we test for steroids, we test for drugs of abuse. We test for misuse of prescription drugs. It's very comprehensive. And in addition to that, we also utilize the services of New York cardiology associates to make sure that we are, are checking and helping our talent who do have this very rigorous lifestyle, you know, to make sure that they are as healthy as they can be. We have...

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) But do you think there is a - problem?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

...but, but...

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Do you think there is a problem with steroid use in wrestling?

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Well, I, I can tell you we've had some positive tests. And our goal is to, is to eliminate that. You know, steroids used improperly without a prescription are, are illegal. And we're not, you know, we're not gonna condone or tolerate that. You know, 75%? No. Our, our, we've had some positives tests that would range about 4% to 6%. And if you, you know, you've got us a three-tiered approach. First time it's a, you know, a suspension without pay for 30 days, then 60 days. Third time, you're out.

ROBIN ROBERTS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) **Linda McMahon**, thank you for your willingness to come in. And I know that it is a, a tragic time for, for many involved. And we just appreciate you, your time this morning.

LINDA MCMAHON (CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF WWE)

Thank you for the opportunity.